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Season Of the Field Trip

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WASHINGTON, May 13 — They descend upon the capital each spring, hundreds of thousands of high school students, emerging from late-night plane rides and two- and three-day bus rides to view the nation's monuments and the workings of government.

The United States Capitol Guide Service estimates that 500,000 students, including a smattering from junior high and elementary schools, tour that building between mid-March and early June. Many are members of high school bands, who perform in their satin finery on the Capitol steps, behind high-stepping baton-twirlers who appear oblivious to soaring temperatures, sudden rainstorms and audiences of passers-by.

For most of the students the trip is a highlight of their senior year, financed by money scraped together from raffles and bake sales. The ritual includes a meeting with a member of the House or Senate for a mini-civics lesson.

Members of Congress seize the opportunity to establish personal contact with the students, many of whom will be of voting age by 1986. This morning, separate clusters of students were addressed by Representatives Jim Bates, a California Democrat in his third year in Congress, and William S. Broomfield, a Michigan Republican serving his 29th year on Capitol Hill.

There was a similarity in the questions raised by both groups and in the responses by the Congressmen. The students asked about the nuts and bolts of how Congress worked and about such issues as the budget deficit, the nuclear freeze and Nicaragua. Both Congressmen stressed the need for compromise.

Mr. Bates met with 35 students from San Diego's Morris High School who had raised \$18,000 for a four-day trip to Washington. The students, members of the school choir, wore

tuxedos and formal gowns when they performed on the Capitol steps Saturday and won second prize in an international competition.

This morning, in blue jeans and souvenir polo shirts and caps, they met their Congressman under a huge maple tree on the Capitol lawn. They had arrived in town after Congress had adjourned and were leaving shortly after both Houses convened.

"It's too bad we couldn't see our Government in action," said Eileen Moss, the choir director.

"That may be a blessing in disguise," Mr. Bates said in jest.

Mr. Bates says he meets with 50 such groups each spring. He began with a basic civics lesson concerning the two houses of Congress, comparing the 47-member California delegation to the three members from Delaware.

How had he trained for Congress? He went to night school for eight years to earn his undergraduate degree, he said. Did he still enjoy his work? "I'm enjoying it more now that I've decided not to trim my sails to respond to temporary popular opinion," he said.

What were the major issues he faced? asked a young man wearing a white "Wash, D.C." cap.

"The big issues of our times are how to fairly tax people and the kind of national defense we should have," Mr. Bates said.

A young woman in a dark skirt and blouse asked about covert aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.

"I'm opposed to covert aid," Mr. Bates replied. "I think it is wrong morally, ethically and militarily. I think the C.I.A. is out of control. Each country in the world has a government. If we want to go against a government, we should declare war."

A Plea for Involvement

The Congressman ended with a plea for involvement in government. "It's not as good as you want it to be, but it's not as bad as it might be, either," Mr. Bates said.

"It's all compromise," he added.

A few moments later, Mr. Broomfield met with a group of honor students on the Capitol steps. It was his second student group of the day.

How did a Congressman get on a committee? "It's just like conducting a campaign," said Mr. Broomfield, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Affairs committee.

Why was the balanced budget amendment always voted down? "The Republicans feel very bad about it, but the Democrats feel that with the spending we have, it's very difficult to get a balanced budget," Mr. Broomfield said.

Were the Japanese "really going to do something about this imbalance in trade"?

"They better get the message," Mr. Broomfield said. "Unless there's a change in attitude, restrictive language will be put in."

What will happen to Social Security benefits? "While the Senate put a freeze on Social Security benefits, I'm not sure the House is going to go that route," Mr. Broomfield replied. "I'm sure there'll be some adjustments, some changes in what the President recommended."

"That's the art of compromise," he added.